urgency, like sporting events do, making them seem more important to watch than dramas or comedies.

Comedies, which had real staying power for decades, were consistently taking a beating in the ratings in the first decades of the 2000s, leading some critics to wonder whether viewers find serial dramas and series reality shows especially addicting. By mid-decade, the biggest draws were Fox's *American Idol* and such crime shows as *NCIS: Los Angeles*, *CSI* and *The Mentalist*. As has always been the case, however, such sporting events as the NFL games swamp all other shows in audience size.

Comedies and dramas are composed of various ingredients that appeal to most audiences: engaging dialogue, attractive characters, romantic themes, nostalgia, suspense and high emotion, to name a few. The audiences for all entertainment genres are also interested in seeing or hearing something novel, even if it is an old idea with a new twist (see 1.6). Reality shows, on the other hand, create a "human spectacle" that is every bit as scripted, primarily through postproduction editing, as programs with a preproduction script.

Information programming is also driven by novelty and entertainment value. Viewers want fresh stories that promise something new. Critics can complain about the trivialization of information, but network and syndicated news and information programming with an entertainment approach (infotainment) attracts big audiences. Consider, for example, the long-time success of *60 Minutes, 20/20* and *The Today Show*. These programs mix popular topics with more serious information.

In their newscasts, local stations also necessarily pay close attention to the lighter side of community events, partly because there are fewer opportunities for hard news than on the national level and partly because "positive" stories appeal strongly to viewers. The trend has reached the point that younger audiences get much of their news from shows that actually mock the news, such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

Looking at the types of programs demanded by audiences is one way to learn what people want, although it is not a perfect method. Some people say they want just comedy, for example, but some sitcoms have "serious" episodes that address social

1.6 Uncovering the Mystery

Merely asking television audiences what they want is difficult. Many times viewers do not know what they want until they see it, and a short while later they tire of it and crave something new. Programmers must become accustomed to dealing with fickle audiences. The only refuge is to uncover the mystery of how the audience makes choices about what to watch.

The process whereby audience members make choices is seldom clear, but researchers use three basic approaches to predict those choices. One way looks at the uses and gratifications of media consumption. This approach frequently substitutes the self-reported attitudes of viewers for more concrete information on their actual behaviors. A second way uses additional predictors of choice, such as market size, program length, awareness, cable/DVD/satellite penetration, and audience availability. Research findings in this area are equally unsatisfying or unusable because really strong predictors, such as when the audience is available, are not usually controlled by the programmers (or the viewers).

The most promising way to predict choice seems to be to study the actual content of programs, but the industry has sponsored very little generalizable research. What element in a television or radio program is most important? Some say it is the likeability of the main characters. Others point to the compelling nature of the story or the format. Little research has been done in this area, perhaps because using structural predictors is easier than using content variables. In any case, studying programming as a serious topic is not easy. The networks and other program suppliers focus on the ratings and on testing ideas and pilots (see Chapter 2), but programming seems to remain one big gamble where instinct is more important than science.

issues, while some dramas venture into comedy. Adding to the general misinformation about programming is the fact that viewers and listeners believe they are programming experts merely because they watch or listen. Most people who tune to a broadcast program feel that they could do a better job of choosing the shows and selecting the time slots. If that were really true, of course, there would be no need for a book on how to be a programmer. Programming skills can be learned, but the art is a bit more difficult than it seems to many people.

The Lure of Lore

Everyone watches television, so nearly everyone professes to understand what programs ought to be like. Yet merely having preferences does not qualify a viewer—or a programmer—to make accurate decisions or judgments about program strategy. Because television viewing is so easy, the audience feels confident that putting shows on is really simple: Just make good programs and schedule them when they do not conflict with other good shows! Never make any bad shows. What could be easier?

Because it's too hard to explain, the professionals who work at the major broadcast and cable networks, along with their counterparts at the individual stations in each city, sometimes take a similarly simplistic stand. Always do this. Never do that. Give the people what they want (see 1.7). Or as Dick Block of the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE) preached, "Find out what works, what doesn't work."

Out of this no-brainer philosophy has grown a garden of "rules" that the wisdom of experience has nurtured. Call it folklore or just lore; many programmers believe that achieving success in television programming is a matter of avoiding common mistakes. Unfortunately, programming is much more complicated. But it is useful to examine some of the lore that has grown up around programming. Certainly some of it may be good advice. Like most lore, however, the student of programming should be suspicious of universal truths.

First, there is the matter of dead genres. A *genre* is a type of program, such as a western or a sitcom. At various times in the history of programming, common wisdom has declared each genre dead. Family sitcoms were dead in 1982, they said—until *Cosby* went on the air. Game shows were dead, they said—until *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* came along. Reality shows such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* were very popular in the early 1990s, and then they were dead—until they came back a decade later in the form of *Survivor*.

Second, program lore holds that there is a formula approach to building a successful show. For example, take a grizzled veteran in an action profession and pair that character with a young person to create dual appeal—something for both older and younger viewers. Or hire a big-name star from the world of movies, music or sports. The problem with such recipes is that they lead to bland television. Moreover, fans can name plenty of programs fitting these formulas that got quickly canceled—far more than shows that lasted on network television.

Third, program lore preaches that certain formats always fail. Anything with chimps. Science-

1.7 A Programming Myth

The late Sydney W. Head was a frequent contributor to earlier editions of this textbook, and he had this to say about programming:

A popular fallacy holds that innumerable workable new program ideas and countless usable new scripts by embryonic writers await discovery and that only the perversity or shortsightedness of program executives keeps this treasure trove of new material off the air. But television executives hesitate to risk huge production costs on untried talents and untested ideas. Even when willing, the results rarely differ much because mass entertainment remains the goal. A national talent pool, even in a country the size of the United States (and even for superficial, imitative programming), is not infinitely large. It takes a certain unusual gift to create programs capable of holding the attention of millions of people hour by hour, day by day, week after week.

Sydney W. Head

fiction drama has never spawned a major network hit, not even *Star Trek* (although *X-Files* came close). Never bank on satire. The list goes on… The internet has become the home for thousands of experiments in program content—most of these amateur, short-lived and attracting few repeat viewers in many cases, but attracting millions to the big successes. A few commercial websites, such as those produced by Comedy Central and some other professional producers, generate huge audiences for a time, but not for the many daily hours that characterize conventional television viewing. So far, only a handful of experimental online programs have given rise to new types of television programs for large audiences, but more may lie ahead. The same problems face radio broadcasters who want to compete with the big guys.

This chapter—indeed, the rest of this book—outlines what practitioners and scholars generally agree are the real fundamentals of programming. These are the building blocks that programmers construct with, whatever the medium, and they go well beyond the lore described above. It takes a gift to create programs capable of holding the attention of millions of people hour by hour, day by day, week after week. Competence in the field comes from understanding the sources of programs, the factors impacting audience size, and the influences of technology, economics, ownership and regulation on programming strategies and practices. Beyond them lies artistry—or magic.

Structural Considerations

Programming can be seen as largely a matter of choosing materials and building a schedule. These two processes—followed by promotion and evaluation—are the essence of what a programmer does on a day-to-day basis. Choosing programs depends on circumstances that are closely linked to the source of the programming, and depends even more on predicting what ratings each show will achieve. Similarly, scheduling is greatly influenced by whether the type of channel that will carry it is broadcast, cable, cell, tablet or online.

Sources of Programs

Four basic program sources exist for television and radio: **Network programs**, **syndicated programs**, **local programs** and **online programs**. These compartments, however, are by no means watertight. Produced shows sometimes develop into hybrid blends of local production and syndication, with an online counterpart. Network entertainment programs "go into syndication" to cable channels or broadcast stations after their initial plays on the national network; then they may be stockpiled online for On Demand replay and aired on tablets. Networks also produce special short segments of programs suited to tablets or smart phone reception.

Network Programs

The national, full-service, interconnected network is broadcasting's way of pooling resources to generate information programming. Newspapers shared news and features by means of news agencies and syndicates long before broadcasting began, but broadcasting introduced the elements of instantaneous national distribution and simultaneous programming. There are nine national commercial television networks: ABC, CBS, CW, FOX, MyNetworkTV (MNTV), NBC, and the three commercial Spanish-language networks (Telemundo—TEL, TeleFutura—TFA, and Univision—UNI), plus one public noncommercial television network (PBS). These ten supply broadcast programs by making or purchasing them.

Aside from news, talk and news-related public-affairs materials which they produce themselves, the six English-language broadcast networks buy most of their programs from the big Hollywood studios (all but one of which are owned by the parent corporation of one of the broadcast networks). Occasionally they buy from the very few remaining independent production firms. The tortuous route from program idea to finished, on-the-air network series is variously described in Chapters 2 and 7.

Network programmers for public broadcasting face still another situation. Originally designed as an alternative to the commercial system, much PBS programming comes ready-made from the larger member stations specializing in production for the network and from small independent producers, but it still buys programs, notably the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which now has its own satellite channel carried on cable in the United States. While PBS selects, schedules and distributes its programming, no programs are produced by the network itself (although PBS now has its own satellite channels that compete with its affiliates, but it does not produce their content either). See Chapter 10 for more on public television's processes.

The Spanish-language networks draw much of their serial programming from Mexico's Televisa, a producer of movies and *telenovelas* (popular soap-opera-like serials with a definite ending after some months and usually with a moral or educational point). Some also comes from South America, particularly Brazil. Univision, the fifth-largest television network in the country, also produces several long-running programs, including the blockbuster of blockbusters: *Sabado Gigante*. TeleFutura, owned by Univision, attracts the second-largest prime-time audiences among the Spanish-language services. Unlike Galavision, a competing cable network, all three broadcasters produce newscasts and carry live and taped sports, especially soccer and tennis matches originating outside the United States.

About 200 cable program networks deliver the bulk of satellite and cable systems' content. Cable networks (called **subscription content networks** in Chapter 9) differ in major respects from broadcast television networks. In technical delivery, they are similar: in both cases a central headquarters (the network) assembles programs and distributes them nationwide, using orbiting satellites to reach thousands of cable systems and some affiliated stations (CNN Headline News, for example, goes straight to some stations).

But the financial and working relationships between broadcasting affiliates and their networks and between cable affiliates and their networks differ fundamentally. In addition to retransmitting broadcast stations, local cable systems supply hundreds of channels of satellite-distributed programming and must deal with hundreds of networks. The traditionally symbiotic relationship between each broadcast network and its 210 or so affiliated stations does not exist in the cable field. Most programmers who work for cable networks also have far less input into the creative aspects of programming than do their broadcast counterparts.

The great bulk of cable network programming comes from the same sources as broadcast programming—distributors of feature films and syndicated programs—and, indeed, much of cable content has been old network programming, although this is rapidly changing as cable networks spend more for recent off-network hits and greatly increase their own production enterprises. Each cable network seeks for a single *signature* program that captures attention and gives definition to the whole network. At the same time, the multiplication of digital *splinter* channels (such as Encore Action, Encore Drama, Encore Love, etc., called virtual channels) has greatly increased the difficulty of the programmer's task of attracting a large audience for any one channel.

The internet has more varied program sources, drawing on both conventional television and radio content as well as on original commercial and amateur sources. The main sources for web series are *Hulu.com*, *blip.tv* and *revver.com*, although *YouTube.com* shows some web series, too. These series may have short or relatively long lives, but only a very few ever appear on over-the-air or cable television.

The traditional radio networks once offered by ABC, CBS and NBC no longer qualify as full-service networks. Those that have not been sold now resemble syndicators, supplying features and program inserts such as newscasts. Conversely, some radio program syndicators supply stations via satellite with complete schedules of ready-to-air music in various established formats, much like the TV networks supply schedules of programs, except that the stations now pay the radio networks for the content. Formerly, the radio networks paid the stations to air the commercials (called *compensation*), but that system is disintegrating.

Syndicated Programs

Local broadcast programmers come into their own when they select syndicated programs for their individual stations. They draw upon the following sources:

- **Off-network series.** Programs that have reverted to their copyright owners after the network that first aired them has used up its contractual number of plays (increasingly, the networks demand a share of ownership rights in many of their shows). These programs used to go directly to stations, but nowadays such cable networks as TNT, USA and A&E gobble up many of the best off-network dramas while TBS and the newer broadcast networks—CW and MNTV—take many of the popular sitcoms to rerun.
- **First-run syndicated series and specials.** Programs packaged independently by producers and marketed directly to individual stations rather than being first seen as network shows (for example, *Entertainment Tonight, Oprah* and *Wheel of Fortune*).
- **Feature films.** Movies made originally for theatrical exhibition, although this category has diminished because so many movies go to such premium cable networks as HBO, Showtime and pay HD channels. See 1.8.

Local Production

Local programs are those shows produced "in-house," usually by professionals on broadcast stations (such as the local newscasts), but sometimes homemade by amateurs who find distribution on public access cable and online channels. Local newscasts play an important role in television and radio station strategies (but even newscasts, though locally produced, often contain a great deal of syndicated material as inserts). Aside from news, however, locally produced material plays only a minor role as a program source. It is true that all-news, all-talk, and all-sports radio stations depend almost entirely on local production, but those formats cost so much to run and have such a specialized appeal that they remain relatively few in number, exist only in the larger markets, and do not have television counterparts. Stations simply find syndicated material cheaper to obtain and easier to sell to advertisers. Localism is more worshipped than practiced.

1.8 Movies, Movies, Movies

Of all the program types, the feature film is the most in demand because of its popularity on so many different delivery systems. The term *window*—borrowed from the world of space flight where it refers to the limited time-space openings when conditions are just right for launching rockets—has been applied to the release sequence by which feature films reach their various markets. First, of course, comes the traditional window of theatrical release—films are either simultaneously released in several thousand theaters throughout the country or put out in stages of "limited release." Next in the usual order of priority come releases through the windows of DVD and pay-per-view cable, then regular pay cable, then broadcast networks, and finally general broadcast and cable syndication. Prices for licenses (and rentals) decrease at each stage of release as products age and lose their timeliness. However, studios sporadically experiment with different release cycles for specialized movies to see what makes more profit.

The Uniqueness of Scheduling

Of all the programmer's basic skills, perhaps *scheduling* comes closest to qualifying as a unique radio and television specialty. Scheduling a station, cable system, or network is a singularly difficult process, and little that is comparable occurs online as yet. Even with hundreds of competing channels, the availability of the web, and the proliferation of remote controls and digital video recorders, the audience for one show normally influences adjacent programs. The influence can be to build up adjacent program audiences or to drag them down. Effective scheduling requires understanding one's own and one's competitors' coverage patterns, market and audience demographics. Most broadcast stations in a market compete directly for viewers and advertising dollars, but some viewers are more desirable than others, and programmers at stations without a network affiliation or with only a poor affiliation are disadvantaged compared with those programmers who deliver the most popular network programs.

Cable system programmers have different problems. They have to weigh the claims of competing services for specific channel locations. Being *repositioned* (moved to a higher channel number) used to be a very contentious issue between stations and cable until the FCC mandated that broadcasters get the same digital and analog cable channel numbers that they used for their over-the-air channels.

This FCC decision, combined with widespread adoption of digital cable, has pretty much made channel positions a nonissue. Nonetheless, if positions are vacant, cable operators prefer to give the choicest positions—the lowest in a group because they are easiest to remember—to the most popular (or most lucrative) services, whether they are broadcast or cable-only. *Cable operators especially favor the cable channels owned all or in part by their parent corporations.*

The Need for Promotion

The broadcast and cable networks forgo billions of dollars in advertising revenue in order to promote their programs on their own air, interrupting programs with clusters of promos and cluttering the bottom of the screen with animated program reminders. Such on-air marketing is essential for interesting viewers in new programs and new episodes of continuing series, and for retaining audiences by making them feel satisfied with the program array. In addition, millions are spent on paid program advertising appearing in other media, and on marketing endeavors in cooperation with such retailers as Kmart or McDonald's. Stations also cosponsor concerts and sporting events to attract audiences to local television and radio programs.

At the same time, having a presence in the online world has become a necessity for all ten broadcast networks. First PBS and then the five biggest commercial networks—ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC and UNI—developed huge multimedia sites on the web, and the major studios and most cable networks followed suit. Television and radio enthusiasts can now point-and-click their way through myriad home pages designed by the networks, their affiliates, the studios, the major cable channels, the programs, the fan clubs and even the program stars themselves. Unlike most blog and podcast sites, these are sophisticated promotional sites created to capture attention, generate buzz and feed the fans' yearning for closer contact with programs and their stars. Commercial interests sponsor most of these sites. Not to be outdone, this textbook itself has a section within *www.wadsworth.com*!

Fred Silverman, a giant in network programming history, understood that how programs were promoted was as important as how they were scheduled. The allocation of immensely valuable airtime to program promotion each year on every network and station is clear evidence that the industry is convinced of the truism that *the best program without promotion has no audience*. If the audience doesn't know what day, what time and what channel a program is on, the *old* viewers who miss the show will have a profound impact on the ratings; if *new* viewers don't see many exciting promos that convince them to watch a network's shows, their absence will certainly also have a profound impact on ratings.

It is crucial to understand that just a ratings point or two stands between the number one and number three broadcast network in most years (and maybe just a point more to number four). Promotion on and off the air is vital to maintaining and increasing standing in that elite group. The same situation occurs among cable networks and at the local level. Cable networks vie to be among the top 10 (or top 25), but most differ by only fractions of a ratings point. The slight advantage given by effective promotion can be the difference between making that top list and falling to some lower grouping, and *advertisers typically buy by grouping*. Local stations often vary only minutely in popularity, too, and a great deal of promotion of a newscast or radio format can boost one station above its competitors.

Promotion of online programs takes a different form nowadays. It largely consists of gaining favored placement in Google lists and other created listings of favorites or types of sites. Virtually all top placement is purchased on Google, at least under generic terms. This revenue contributes to a large part of a search engine's income. Placement is no longer luck of the draw or someone's idiosyncratic whim except perhaps on individuals' sites.

Networks, stations, systems and sites are also concerned with their overall images. Increasingly, fostering positive images around the world has value in building audiences for exported programs and associated products (this is called *branding*). Google and Apple have world recognition as brand names at least as widely known as those of Disney, CBS, Fox, NBC and the biggest movie studios, and they allot enormous budgets to increasing and maintaining those brand names. Promotion, then, is one path through the labyrinth leading to high visibility, high ratings and thus high revenue.

The Elements of Programming

The various strategies for selecting, scheduling, promoting and evaluating programs are derived from a set of assumptions about audience behavior. These broad assumptions, which are here organized into five groups, become the basis for strategies capitalizing on them, even in the changing media environment:

- Compatibility
- Habit formation
- Control of audience flow
- Conservation of program resources
- Breadth of appeal

Compatibility

Scheduling strategies take advantage of the fact that programs can be timed to coincide with what people do throughout the daily cycle of their lives. The continuously unfolding nature of radio and television allows programmers to schedule different kinds of program material, or similar program materials in different ways, into various dayparts. Programmers strive to make their programming compatible with the day's round of what most people do—getting up in the morning and preparing for the day; driving to work; doing the morning household chores; breaking for lunch; enjoying an afternoon lull; engaging with children after they return from school; accelerating the tempo of home activities as the day draws to a close; relaxing during early prime time; and indulging in the more exclusively adult interests of later prime time, the late fringe hours and the small hours of the morning. And, of course, compatibility calls for adapting to the changed activity schedules of Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Programmers speak of these strategies in terms of *dayparting*—scheduling different types of programs to match parts of the day known by such terms as early fringe, prime time and in the case of radio, drivetime.

Cable television's approach to compatibility has historically differed from broadcasting's approach. Each broadcast station or network has traditionally had only a single channel at its disposal (even if it shows up on two or three places in the electronic guide with different numbers). In consequence, broadcast programmers must plan compatibility strategies for what they judge to be the "typical" lifestyles of audiences. Most cable networks target more narrowly. Like the internet, an entire cable or satellite system accommodates so many channels that it can devote some to every type of audience at all hours, ignoring dayparts. They can cater to the night-shift worker with sports at 6 A.M., to the single-person household with movies at 6 P.M., to the teenager with round-the-clock videos—by using a different channel to serve each interest.

The daily share of viewing of the Big Four broadcast television networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC) fell below the combined viewing of cable channels several years ago. Broadcasters' economics—and thus clout—have diminished dramatically because in such large metropolitan areas as New York City cable/satellite penetration has reached 91 percent.

Even so, many cable channels effectively shut down their program services during low-viewing dayparts (for example, 3 to 7 A.M.) and let *infomercials* reign. The owners find it hard to resist the guaranteed advertising income from program-length commercials at a time of day when the audience size is both too small to attract mainstream advertisers and not large enough to generate viewer complaints that the usual shows are missing. By contrast, *internet use climbs when television is weakest.*

Habit Formation

Compatibility strategies acquire even greater power because audience members form habits of listening and watching. Scheduling programs for strict predictability (along with promotional efforts to make people aware of both the service as a whole and of individual programs) establishes tuning habits that eventually become automatic. Indeed, in spite of having DVRs, some people will go to extraordinary lengths to avoid missing the next episode in a favorite series the moment it is aired. Programmers discovered the basic principle in the early days of radio when the *Amos 'n' Andy* habit became so strong that movie theaters in the 1930s shut down their pictures temporarily and hooked radios into their sound systems at 7:15 P.M. when *Amos 'n' Andy* came on. At about that time the fanatic loyalty of soap opera fans to their favorite series also became apparent, a loyalty still cultivated by today's televised serial dramas.

Ideally, habit formation calls for *stripping* programs—scheduling them Monday through Friday at the same time each day, just as evening news is stripped daily on network-affiliated stations. To strip original prime-time programs, however, would require building up a backlog of these expensive shows, which would tie up far too much capital. Moreover, networks want maximum latitude for strategic maneuvers in the all-important prime-time schedule. If a broadcast network stripped its three prime-time hours with the same six half-hour shows each night, it would be left with only six pawns to move around in the scheduling chess game instead of the two dozen or so pawns that the weekly scheduling of programs of varying lengths makes possible.

When weekly prime-time network shows go into syndication, however, stations and cable networks schedule them daily in strips (one episode daily at the same time), a strategy requiring a large number of episodes. *A prime-time series has to have been on a network for four years (with the prospect of one more year) to accumulate enough episodes for a year's stripping in syndication (including a substantial number of reruns).* Because few weekly shows survive five years of prime-time competition, the industry periodically faces a nagging shortage of quality off-network programs suitable for syndication. Syndicated game shows, such as the long-running *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*, fill the gap. Necessarily, cable networks also pick up shows that had short runs, but for lower licensing prices.

Cable has adopted different patterns. Especially when just starting out, networks such as FX and Oxygen stripped sitcoms not only day to day but across most of each evening until their revenues permitted more variety in programs. Networks such as A&E, USA and TNT also strip expensive hit dramas that are freshly off-network in early evenings and prime time.

No one knows whether audiences find themselves more comfortable with the structured, compatible, predictable scheduling of traditional television than with a multitude of digital programming choices. Researchers investigating *channel repertoire* have often observed that, when scores of options are available to listeners and viewers, most tune in to only eight or so of the possible sources. For example, for many years, when Nielsen Media Research surveyed homes with access to 200 or more television channels, it used to find consistently that viewers watched only about 15 of them for more than one hour per week. Which 15 varies by household, of course. (Nielsen no longer tries to measure repertoire because the definition of "channel" has become so slippery.) The increased variety of program choices made possible by digital cable/satellite television and DVRs seems to have weakened viewing habits. Only about half of viewers (mostly women) choose in advance the programs they watch. The other half plays with the remote control.

Even so, some people may sometimes prefer to have only a limited number of choices. They find it confusing and wearying to sift through scores of options before settling on a program. We've all run across the complaint about having hundreds of channels and nothing to watch! *Broadcast scheduling, as a consequence of compatibility* *strategies and a tendency toward habit formation, preselects a varied sequence of listening and viewing experiences skillfully adapted to the desires and needs of a target audience*. People can then choose an entire service—an overall entertainment pattern (or "sound" in the case of radio)—rather than individual programs.

New technologies like DVRs have increased time shifting but are not likely to eliminate the average viewer's need to form patterns of behavior. Most people are creatures of habit, and television viewing is an activity that begs for routines. Indeed, DVRs may actually enhance habit formation because they make it easier to catch all the episodes of a favorite show, thus strengthening a habit. Grazing via remote controls diminishes for those who make use of their DVRs: Viewers can watch live TV and fill in the gaps when "nothing good is on" with saved favorites.

1.9 Television Versus Books, Newspapers, and Movies

Controlling audience flow becomes problematic because listeners and viewers have freedom of choice. Unlike a consumer faced with the limited decision of whether to buy a book, subscribe to a newspaper, or attend a movie, electronic media consumers can choose instantaneously and repeatedly by switching back and forth among programs at will. Hence, programmers cannot count on even the slight self-restraint that keeps a book buyer reading a book or a ticket buyer watching a movie so as not to waste the immediate investment. And, obviously, the polite social restraint that keeps a bored lecture audience seated does not inhibit radio and television audiences. Programmers have the job of holding the attention of a very tenuously committed audience. Its members take flight at the smallest provocation. Boredom or unintelligibility act like a sudden shot into a flock of birds.

Control of Audience Flow

The assumption that audiences welcome, or at least tolerate, preselection of their programs most of the time accounts for strategies arising from the notion of *audience flow*. Even in a multichannel environment with dozens of choices, the next program in a sequence can capture the attention of the viewers of the previous program. At scheduling breaks, when one program comes to an end and another begins, programmers visualize the audience as flowing from one program to the next in any of three possible directions: They try to maximize the number of audience members that *flow through* to the next program on their own channel and the number that *flow in* from rival channels or home video, at the same time minimizing the number that *flow away* to competing channels or activities.

Many scheduling practices hinge on this concept. Audience flow considerations have traditionally dominated the strategies of the commercial broadcast and cable networks and affiliates (see 1.9). Blocking several similar comedies in adjacent time slots, for example, takes advantage of audience flow. By contrast, *counterprogramming* (scheduling programs with differing appeals against each other) is crucial to the strategies of small-audience channels that seek to direct the flow away from competing channels to themselves.

Fortunately for programmers, when watching television on large home screens, many audience members remain afflicted by *tuning inertia*. Although hundreds of options often exist in a cable, satellite, online, and tablet environment, *people tend to leave the channel selector alone unless stimulated into action by some forceful reason for change*. Many times, viewers are engaged in simultaneous activities that preclude a focused attention to what programs might be available on other channels. Moreover, programmers believe that children can be used as a kind of stalking horse: Adults will tend to leave the set tuned to whatever channel the children chose for an earlier program.

The greater number of program options provided by cable/satellite/telco and online services and the convenience of remote controls and DVRs have certainly lessened—but not eliminated—the effect of tuning inertia. Researchers recognize several ways the audience uses the remote control keypad to manipulate programming: *grazing*, hunting up and down the channels until one's attention is captured; *flipping*, changing back and forth between two channels; *zapping*, changing the channel to avoid a commercial interruption; and *zipping*, fast-forwarding a recording to avoid commercials or to reach a more interesting point. While grazing has fallen off, jumping between two programs (such as two games) and zipping through recorded commercials are commonplace. Moreover, the home playback unit has undermined Saturday evening ratings for both broadcast and cable programmers: Huge numbers of viewers regularly rent DVDs on Saturday nights from Netflix. Thus, tuning inertia continues as only a modest factor to consider in broadcast programming strategies.

Program flow is nearly irrelevant for some formats such as all-news radio, all-weather cable channels, and specialized subscription channels, which actually invite audience flow in and out. Some formats aim not at keeping audiences continuously tuned in but at getting them to constantly return. As a widely used all-news radio slogan goes, "Give us 22 minutes, and we'll give you the world." One cable news service used to promote itself in variations of "All the news in 30 minutes." The Weather Channel doesn't expect even weather buffs to watch for hours, just to return periodically.

In any case, the overall strategic lesson taught by the freedom-of-choice factor is that *programs must always please, entertain and be easily understood.* Much elitist criticism of program quality arises simply because of the democratic nature of the medium. Critics point out that programs must descend to the lowest common denominator of the audience they strive to attract. This fact need not mean the absence of program quality. After all, some programs aim at elite audiences among whom the lowest common denominator can be very high indeed.

Conservation of Program Resources

Radio and television notoriously burn up program materials at a high rate. This is an inevitable consequence of the continuousness attribute. That fact makes program conservation an essential strategy. See 1.10.

1.10 Reruns

Anyone who doubts the difficulty of appealing to mass audiences need only consider the experience of the older media. Of 25,000 to 28,000 new books printed in any one year, only less than 1 percent sell 100,000 or more copies; of 12,000 or so records copyrighted, fewer than 200 music recordings go gold; of 200 feature film releases, only 5 percent gross the amount of money reckoned as the minimum for breaking even. And yet audiences for these media are small compared with the nightly prime-time television audience.

Sometimes audience demands and conservation happily coincide, as when the appetite for a new hit song demands endless replays and innumerable arrangements. Eventually, however, obsolescence sets in, and the song becomes old hat. Radio and television are perhaps the most obvious examples of our throwaway society. Even the most massively popular and brilliantly successful program series eventually loses its freshness and goes into the limbo of the umpteenth rerun circuit.

A high percentage of the programming on cable networks and online consists of repeats of the same items. The broadcast networks also schedule plenty of reruns and now reuse their shows—*repurposing*—on their other owned broadcast and cable networks and online, as well as reformatting them for cells and tablets. Material related to the popular programs shows up in magazine articles, blogs and talk shows. The internet has stimulated production of new programs and program types, but on the whole, online and cable heighten program scarcity rather than alleviating it.

One further complicating factor, at least for hit series, is their easy availability on DVD. If someone really loves a show, they can buy a whole season or entire multiyear runs as a boxed set and need not search for it in reruns.

Frugality must be practiced at every level and in every aspect of programming. Consider how often audiences see or hear "the best of so-and-so," a compilation of bits and pieces from previous programs; flashback sequences within programs (especially in soap operas); news actualities broken into many segments and parceled out over a period of several hours or days; the annual return of past years' special-occasion programs; sports shows patched together out of stock footage; the weather report broken down into separate little packets labeled marine forecasts, shuttle-city weather, long-term forecast, weather update, aviation weather and so on.

The enormous increase in demand for program materials created by the growth of cable television and the internet would be impossible to satisfy were it not that the multichannel media lend themselves to repeating programs much more liberally than does single-channel broadcasting. A pay-cable channel operates full time by scheduling fewer than 50 or so programs a month—mostly movies—and runs each film four to six times. Furthermore, movies first scheduled one month turn up again in the following months in still more reruns, which pay-cable programmers euphemistically call **encores**. Even the basic cable channels rotate the showing of their movies and series, based on the idea that the audience at 8 P.M. will be different from the audience at 1 A.M. For example, A&E *double-runs* (plays the same episode of) many of its prime-time series, and the internet makes available archives of thousands (even millions) of old programs—all of which makes frugality in sharing and repeating programs even more crucial.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, several of the broadcast television networks began offering regularly scheduled repeats as part of their prime-time lineups. Borrowing a strategy from cable, the broadcast networks recognized that viewers were accustomed to having multiple opportunities to see first-run shows within the same week. "This is inevitable," said Preston Beckman, the executive vice president of FOX Entertainment. "No network can program 22 hours any more, or in our case 15 hours."[2] Not surprisingly, the networks chose low-viewing nights for the repeats, conserving the cost of filler programming.

Programmers can also make creative use of low-quality shows. The SyFy Channel features packages of old monster and ghost movies, and SOAPnet replays old daytime soap operas for new generations of fans, just as Nickelodeon reruns old cartoons over and over. Another reuse strategy is evident in programs such as *Soap Opera Digest.*

A major aspect of the programmer's job consists of devising ingenious ways to get the maximum mileage out of each program item. One strategy is to develop formats that require as little new material as possible for the next episode or program in the series; another is to invent clever excuses for repeating old programs over and over; a third, the newest, is to adopt *multiplatform strategies* for each program as it is conceived. For the best programs, viewers seek more and more experience with each show, its characters, its plot twists, even merchandise. Programmers respond to the viewers' desire for more interactions by using *extensions* that may include websites and blogs, podcasts and other feedback. Nowadays, extensions spin off all hit programs. They show up in magazine articles and books while spreading across television in the form of program guests, guest hosts, and guest contestants. In the view of a programmer, there's no end to a good idea.

Before it ever airs, programmers plan versions of a show for broadcast television, for pay-per-view, for various internet locations, for tablets, for cell phones, for magazines, and so on, although such multiplatform approaches are usually only implemented when a show actually becomes a hit. The losers—without dedicated cult followings—just fade away. *The point is that any beginner can design a winning schedule for a single week on a single channel; a professional has to plan simultaneously for all media as well as for the attrition that inevitably sets in as weeks stretch into the indefinite future.* See 1.11.

Breadth of Appeal

Stations and cable systems recoup their high capital investment and operating costs only by appealing to a wide range of audience interests. This statement might seem self-evident, yet for many years, some public broadcasters made a virtue out of ignoring "the numbers game," leaving the race for ratings to commercial broadcasters. But this fundamentally unrealistic viewpoint has given way to the strategy of aiming for a high cumulative number of viewers rather than for high ratings for each individual program. This strategy coincides

1.11 Ripple Effect TV©

Truly successful TV programs are so compelling that they draw an audience that is not content to merely watch. The audience is hungry to go beyond the passive and to commune with others in chat rooms and virtual environments—to post videos, download additional content, buy the T-shirt, get updates on tablets and phones, and so on. If a program creates a deep enough sense of involvement (which is the currency of all interaction), then a creative extension backed up by a rewarding user experience will respond to that desire for further interaction with the program.

The programming for which program extensions work best can be thought of as Ripple Effect TV©. These are the programs that people talk about—the ones that show up most often in the blogosphere. With the ripple effect, the first broadcast is like a stone dropping in water. The biggest splash occurs at the point of impact, but thereafter the ring of concentric circles fans out to ripple across a range of platforms, bringing with it further opportunities to profitably harness the audience's sense of involvement—to allow that audience to develop itself into a community and to satisfy its desires—before coming back (i.e., to the original TV show's next episode) for more.

Michael Bloxham, Ph.D.,
Vice President, Trendline Interactive

with the goal of cable/satellite operators, whose many channels enable them to program to small audiences on some channels, counting on the cumulative reach of all channels to bring in sufficient subscriptions to make a profit. The internet inherently has this broad reach, although not the big profits—as yet.

The national television broadcasting networks continue to "cast" their programs across the land from coast to coast with the aim of filling the entire landscape. Of course, no network expects to capture all the available viewers. A top-rated prime-time program draws between 10 and 15 percent of the available audience, although extraordinary programs get nearly double that proportion of viewers.

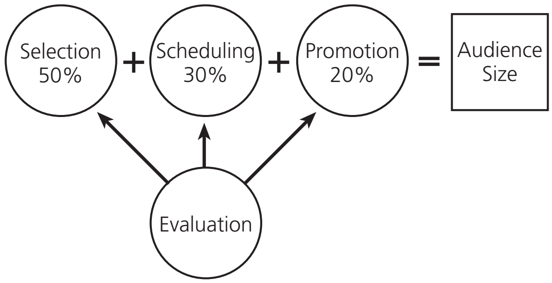
Nevertheless, by any standard, audiences for prime-time broadcast television networks are *enormous*. Although the audience shares of the Big Four broadcast networks had dropped from 90 percent of viewers to less than 40 percent by 2012, a single program can still draw an audience so large it could fill a Broadway theater every night for a century. It is important to understand that a rating of 10 still means more than 10 million households are watching a program, and since households average 2.6 people, that means that 26 million people watched a show. Such size can be achieved only by cutting across demographic lines and appealing to many different social groups. Network television can surmount differences of age, sex, education and lifestyle that would ordinarily segregate people into many separate subaudiences.

A Model of Programming

As pointed out earlier, the process of actually doing the job of programming divides into four major parts. First, programmers must select programs to go into a program lineup—and separate lineups may be needed for large home screens, for tablets, or for online services. Then they must schedule the programs in an arrangement that maximizes the likelihood of their being viewed by the desired audience. Next, they must promote them to attract attention to new shows and new episodes of series and tell viewers where to find the shows. Finally, they must continually evaluate the outcome of their decisions. These complex decision-making processes of selection, scheduling, and promotion, modified by feedback from evaluation, ultimately determine the size and composition of the audience and suggest a series of pictorial models.

The model in 1.12 shows each of the major components exerting a proportional influence on the resulting audience. *The model shows that the*

1.12 Basic Four-Part Programming Model



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selection component contributes roughly 50 percent to ratings; the scheduling component contributes about 30 percent; and the promotion component contributes about 20 percent. These proportions, however, vary widely for particular media, for particular programs, for different times of day, and even at different times in media history.

Selection, for instance, was probably much more important and promotion much less important in the 1950s when CBS and NBC dominated television viewing. Increasing competition in television came first from ABC and later from FOX, then from cable, then from even more broadcast networks (UPN and the WB which later merged into CW). Then PAX morphed into Ion, UNI grew up and added TeleFutura, Telemundo added viewers, and FOX invented MNTV. Now the internet, tablets and smart phones compete directly with broadcast television, altering the relative importance of each component in the television programming process. Moreover, scheduling has to be understood as operating now across the various media. *Overall, competition has boosted the importance of promotion and diminished the salience of scheduling, especially for new programs and new services*.

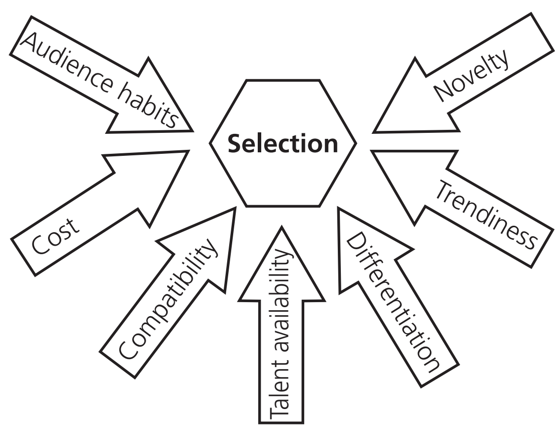
In contrast to television, for popular all-music radio stations promotion is sometimes the most significant component in the determination of radio audience size and composition. On-air contests and games have a great deal to do with music station popularity. For all-news and talk radio and television, scheduling surfaces as the arena of competition and ongoing dynamism. For emerging web series channels, selection remains the key component.

If the model in 1.12 appears mechanistic, that is quite misleading. Even after more than a half century of concentrated attention, *programming remains as much an art as a science*. And nowhere is that more evident than in the enormous wealth of online programming. As the subsequent chapters will reveal, at all stages the processes and outcomes of programming are affected by the sparkle of insight, imagination and inspiration.

Selection

The figure shown in 1.13 illustrates some of the many components affecting the selection stage for electronic media that are spelled out in the following chapters. For the broadcast networks, these components include the scarcity of top-notch writers, the high financial risk of trying markedly different program ideas, and the escalating costs per episode for the onscreen and off-screen talent. For cable networks, the same factors are important for choosing programs, as is the need, usually, to target an underserved audience group. As significant as individual

1.13 Selection Factors



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programs are, even more important is the overall composite that creates a "format" for the cable or radio channel or internet site.

Additional factors that affect the selection of programs for cable and satellite networks include the need for differentiation from competing channels, costs relative to other program types, and the ability to capture space on local cable or satellite systems to reach an audience. On the internet, imaginative designs and antiauthority appeals to teen and young adults are key elements.

In radio and online music programming, enormous efforts go into choosing the songs that appeal to a particular demographic and psychographic group. Whether they are called music directors or programmers, the crucial task of the people making these efforts is to find and keep current the songs that the audience will tune in to hear.

Scheduling

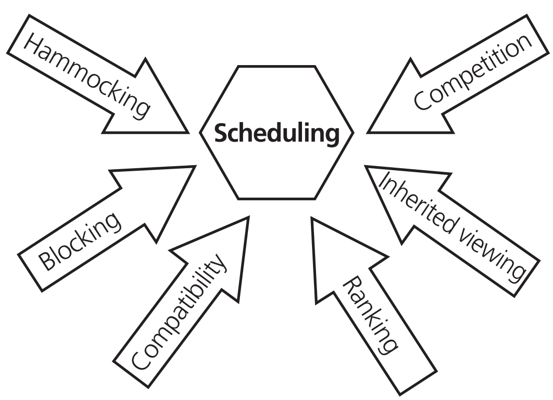
It has been long understood that *the size of the prime-time television audience is affected by the amount and type of competing programs, the amount of viewing inherited from preceding programs, and the compatibility between adjacent programs* (see 1.14). The most studied of these elements, the amount of inherited viewing between adjacent programs, has been consistently shown to hover around 50 percent in prime time. This means that half of the viewers watching Program B on a channel had already watched Program A on that channel.[3] Program B's other viewers come from other channels or are newly tuned in for the evening. Inheritance, however, is known to be much lower between incompatible programs and between nonadjacent programs. Few of the viewers of a romantic drama, for example, would choose to stay tuned for a violent action movie.

Moreover, inheritance is dramatically lower outside of prime time. One big exception is between two adjacent soap operas, when inherited viewing usually goes up. By contrast, only 10 percent of television viewers are likely to flow from program to program in the morning daypart because of the other activities and obligations of their daily lives—going to work, for example.

In radio, careful attention to each nuance of song rotation and news story rotation leads to ongoing scheduling adjustments. Similar attention to detail is required of online music and video, but as Chapter 4 explains, most of early focus was on the technology, and scheduling strategies have only recently gotten attention and continue to alter as they seem successful or unsuccessful. Most websites schedule by topic, genre or alphabetical name. YouTube and its many imitators let viewers know which clips and shows are "most recent" or "most popular" so that users can go directly to that programming.

Ordering by title or recency also applies to sites that replay actual television shows (*Netflix*, *Hulu* and *Hulu Plus*, *Crackle*, *TV-4-PC.com*, *your-free-satellite.com*, *free-internet-tv.com*, *the-free-tv.com*, and *various iPad apps*). Counts of hits reveal movements, and measures of time-spent-watching a show tell the presumed length of viewing (only presumed because computer users are often doing more than one thing simultaneously), but content on many sites that might be called "programs" doesn't divide into tidy half-hour-long and hour-long parcels. To date, systems haven't been refined for counting what's watched on smart phones, for example.

1.14 Scheduling Factors



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Promotion

The figure shown in 1.15 names some characteristics that impact the effectiveness of promotional spots on the air—such as the location of spots within a program, the position of those spots within breaks, the distance between the promotion and the promoted program (Next? Later tonight? Next week? Next month?), and the familiarity of the program to viewers or listeners. Such considerations as the physical environment of a message, the number of people reached, and the frequency of seeing or hearing the message also affect the efficacy of both on-air and print promotion. *Program promotion is constantly manipulated in the struggle to gain and hold ratings.*

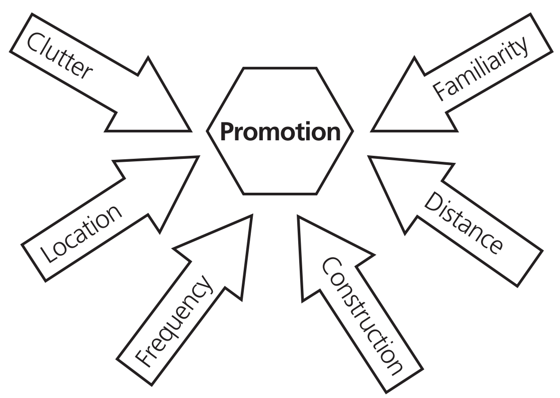
Evaluation

Programmers must constantly appraise programs using ratings, hits or other measures, interpreted by the honed instincts and experience of the programmer. Here, evaluation refers to the ongoing interpretation of quantitative information and qualitative judgments that results in revisions of show selections, changes in the scheduling of already selected programs, and modifications in their promotion. One important result of increased competition from cable and new broadcast networks, as well as from the internet, has been to drive the process of programming into constant flux. At local stations and at national and global networks, a static program lineup tends to lose ground, while ongoing refinements help to maintain and even increase audience size. This shifting of program times much irritates habitual viewers!

In 1.16, evaluation has a wide range of constituents, some directly related to program audiences and others of larger social scope. For example, the success of the competing programs affects a programmer's interpretation of ratings. A show with low ratings scheduled against a megahit on another channel might well be considered reasonably successful, whereas the same show in a less challenging location would be expected to perform much better in the ratings. Consider, for example, the inherent difficulty of trying to target men viewers (on networks other than the one with *Monday Night Football*) on Monday nights during football season.

In addition, the programmers' specific assumptions about an audience's behavior and viewing or listening motivations affect how programs are selected, scheduled and promoted. In one town, for example, workers start and end their jobs early, making afternoons a good time to program to them, whereas in another town, companies have var-

1.15 Promotion Factors



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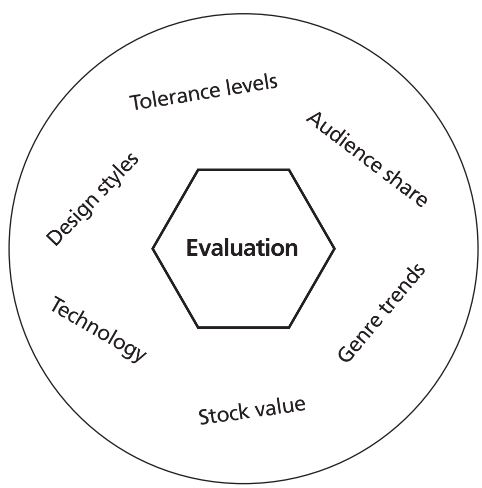
1.16 Evaluation Factors



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ied schedules, lessening impact on the number of available afternoon viewers. Consider how complex programming would be in a country where the people speak not just one or two but 11 different languages (see 1.17 for a description of television in South Africa today).

Programmers' understanding of the impact and use of the newest technologies is also vital. Smart phones and tablets, as well as DVRs, have much affected the processes of program selection and scheduling, and the growth of online music listening has altered the strategies of traditional broadcast radio stations. Other factors that programmers must constantly scope out are the trends in popularity of particular program genres, fads in star performers, styles in design and sound effects, and so on. *The programmer's nearly unconscious awareness of what is going to become popular and his or her ability to capture it in programming decisions comprise much of what is meant by the creative side of programming.*

Although some critics have decried the constant changes in television program lineups in the last decades, industry experience suggests that ongoing change is essential. Programmers tend to assume that audiences—especially the highly desirable young adults—are fickle, have short attention spans, become easily bored, follow fads, and find other forms of entertainment. It may be that many program ideas (and songs) wear out and become stale more rapidly than in the past, partly resulting from clones, reruns, repeat plays of music, or web chat about a series or song. It may be that performers peak for a shorter time than in the past as a result of constant media attention. It may also be that programmers perceive their careers to depend on identifying and eliminating tiny flaws in program lineups and formats. Whatever the reason, *ongoing feedback from the evaluation process is a critical component of the programming process.*

In sum, the basic model of selection, scheduling, promotion, and evaluation guides the approaches to specific programming situations that appear in subsequent chapters of this book. Collectively, the main model and its parts (1.12 to 1.16) illustrate some major components of the programming process that vary in the strategies for specific situations. These strategies, as well as the commonplace practices of programming—and the magical creative element—are the topics of this book.

1.17 Television in Many Languages

With a population of just 46 million people, South Africa has only five national television channels and no regional channels. Of these five, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), similar to the BBC in Britain and the CBC in Canada, programs and distributes three channels nationwide. These channels have to serve a population that speaks 11 different languages, and although much of the audience is bi- or multilingual, a large proportion does not understand English.

Most of SABC's programs are nonetheless in English, including such American daytime and prime-time shows as *Oprah*, *The District*, and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. South African–made "soapies" and mini-dramas are also very popular. Within these shows, programmers mix languages and also use English subtitling to overcome the language problem. To serve educational and political needs, national and international news is broadcast in 7 of the 11 languages at various times and on different channels. As you might imagine, scheduling becomes an enormous challenge!

The two competing (non-SABC) channels in South Africa broadcast only in English, although one of them, e-tv, presently attracts the second-largest audience in the country. The other is a subscription (pay) movie channel. All five of South Africa's television channels carry advertisements.

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Former Director of Audience Research SABC, South Africa

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External Influences on Programmers

Beyond learning the nuts-and-bolts programming framework, the novice programmer must deal with strong external pressures that powerfully—at times—affect decision making, for good or ill. Five sets of influences are outlined briefly in the following sections. Because the distribution system influences the kinds of programming chosen, technological issues are considered first. Without money (economic influences), of course, there can be no widespread development of new technologies. From economics flows some kind of structure, creating ownership influences. Whenever corporations and economies get in the way of individual rights, governments create regulatory influences. Finally, this chapter discusses what is morally right about the work of a programmer (ethical influences). For example, does the end (ratings success) justify the means (pandering to fickle viewers)?

Technological Influences

The long-term effect of media digitization has been to lessen station dependence on traditional national networks for television and radio programming, both as sources of original material and of off-network syndicated material; indeed, it tends also to reduce the number of local stations (see Chapter 8). The development of HD dramatically affected viewers' choice of channels, and 3D is next. Although 3D is attracting top-notch production talent, relatively little makes it all the way to home television receivers as yet. The newest portables can display entire television broadcasts, and some run on solar power. The broadcast networks may be the biggest guys on the block, but they find themselves less able to invest in high-cost series programming because of the audience's shift to watching cable networks, playing back rented and purchased DVDs and downloads, and playing games on the internet for long hours.

Contributing to this audience erosion is the increased difficulty of persuading affiliates to clear all requested time for network schedules. At one time the networks had considerable leverage over affiliates because the networks leased the coaxial-microwave relays that were the sole real-time program distribution system. Clearances of network programs were virtually automatic then. Now, however, satellites give affiliates many alternate sources of instantaneous delivery at reasonable cost. All this encourages the emergence of new program providers. Nonnetwork group owners play a prominent role among them.

Another huge technological influence is the inevitable creeping convergence of computers, telephones and television. There is little doubt that the various media have begun to come together in and out of the home. For example, the merging of personal communication assistants (Palm Pilots, BlackBerrys, Treos and their clones, best known by the older name of PDAs) with cell phones and tablets and Wi-Fi internet access signaled the arrival of portable web/television (see Chapter 4). Surprisingly, convergence came to handheld devices before it fully arrived in living rooms!

Economic Influences

There is a saying in business: "Good, fast, cheap—choose two." *The idea that quality, speed and price cannot all occur at the same time is also true for programming*. If most programming is like cheap fast food, then we should not be surprised that the quality is not high. The cost of extremely well-executed programming is high, and only two or three new TV series survive through a second season or longer (see Chapter 2). Each year, program development costs hundreds of millions of dollars. In other businesses it is known as Research and Development. In television it is called failure, or futility, or a wasteland.

The high failure rate of television programs attracts constant attention in newspapers and magazines and in TV news and talk shows like *Entertainment Tonight*, but when television shows are compared to other sources of entertainment, such as movies, books and Broadway plays, the TV failure rate does not seem so serious. The kinds of programs prevalent at any given time can be directly linked to economics. Some programs can be produced cheaply: soaps, game shows, talk shows, reality formats and tabloid news. In each case, there is little expense involved because there is no need for top-name stars or sophisticated writing. These shows may not win many awards, but they create audience demand without incurring huge costs.

Economic pressures also include the cost of waiting for a show to "grow" into its time slot. Considerable lore has evolved about several programs that had early low ratings and might never have become successful but that were, for various reasons, allowed to stay on the networks' schedules despite their ratings. Some shows seem to need incubation time to "find an audience." *Amazing Grace* was such a series, almost getting cancelled several times before rising in the ratings in the fifth year. Some program producers feel that the audience never gets a chance to discover some shows because cancellations come too quickly because so many millions of dollars are at stake.

In addition, a situation can arise where a show is canceled even when it finishes among the top shows for the week. Anyone who remembers *The Single Guy* or *Jesse* will realize that some successful shows owe most of their success to the preceding program. If the lead-in show has a huge audience, even a precipitous falloff can leave a strong audience share for the weaker following program, but programmers want shows that maintain or build the audience shares from the preceding shows. As Chapter 2 explains, *programs that "drop share" are canceled, regardless of seemingly high rankings.*

Ownership Influences

To function in media programming, it is necessary to know who the major players are. The six media giants in 1.18 are the companies that have enormous interests throughout broadcasting, cable and the internet. The major commercial television studios and producers appear in 1.19. As these charts show, these big companies own powerful media interests and combine production, distribution and exhibition of programs—the condition called vertical integration. The expansion of these mega-corporations into all aspects of media was an outcome of the repeal of the financial interest and network syndication rules (Fin-Syn).

Because much of media content is produced by network-run or network-owned studios, programmers must make difficult choices among competing company interests when acquiring shows. Enhancing the parent corporation's stock market value usually outweighs the importance of higher ratings on a particular channel, and executives at the highest levels are generally focused on maximizing revenue to the parent corporation. As Chapter 2 explains, to boost profits, when networks have a strong show, they give it their best time slot. When they have a strong show in a weak time slot, they often sell it to others (as Warner Brothers did with *Friends* to NBC). If a time slot is strong but the owned show is weak, the network normally tries to buy better programs from others. If both the show and the time slot are weak, then the network should recycle its own library (old movies) or buy cheap reality shows.

Ownership also directly affects programmers at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Nowadays, nearly all broadcast stations and cable systems belong to companies that own far more than one station or system. The profitability of broadcast and cable investments attracts corporate buyers, who gain important economies of scale from multiple ownership. Because they can buy centrally in large quantities, they can get reduced prices for many kinds of purchases, including programs. Current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Justice Department policies encourage the formation of multimedia companies and very large, diversified conglomerates, making group ownership the pattern of the industry. Although the failed merger between AOL and Time Warner was the first signal of the web's to major-player stakes, now Google and Facebook loom over the entire industry. And although AT&T owns only cable systems and phone lines, its executives ponder content ownership, for sure.

In broadcasting, the owner of two or more stations within a given type (AM, FM, TV) is called a *group owner*, while in cable television the owner of three or more cable systems is called a *multiple system operator* (MSO). To group MSOs with satellite and telephone companies that deliver television, the broader term *multichannel video programming distributor (MVPD)* applies. About three-quarters of the nearly 1,300 commercial American television stations are under group control (one-third are controlled by the top 25 groups), and big groups control about three-quarters of the 12,000 U.S. radio stations. In cable, the percentage of systems is even higher, with more than 90 percent owned by an MVPD.

1.18 The Players

Disney

ABC • ESPN • Radio Disney • ESPN Radio • ABC News Radio • Disney Channel • ABC Family • Lifetime* • A&E* • Disney XD • Disney Music Group • Walt Disney Pictures • Marvel Entertainment • Miramax Films • Pixar • Disney Theme Parks • Resorts • Disney Consumer Products (toys, books, software) • ABC Owned Television and Radio Stations

Viacom

MTV Networks (7) • VH1 (3) • Nickelodeon (6) • BET (4) • CMT (3) • Comedy Central • Spike • Palladia • TMF • Comedy Gold • VIVA • Xfire • Atom Entertainment Group • Neopets • GoCityKids • Quizilla • Paramount Pictures • Republic Pictures • Viacom International

CBS

CBS • The CW** • Showtime • The Movie Channel • Flix • CBS Television Studios (Paramount) • King World Productions • CBS Outdoor • CBS/?Paramount Television • CBS Consumer Products • Simon & Schuster • CBS Owned Television and Radio Stations

Time Warner

The CW** • TNT • TBS • CNN • CNN Headline News • HBO • MAX (Cinemax) • Boomerang • The Cartoon Network • Adult Swim • Kids' WB • TheWB.com • Warner Bros. Entertainment • DC Comics • Hanna-Barbera • New Line Cinema • Castle Rock Entertainment • Time Inc. (publisher of magazines and books) • Time Warner Cable Systems

News Corporation

FOX • Fox News Channel • Fox Business Network • Fox Sports Channel • Fox College Sports • Big Ten Network • Fox Soccer Network • SPEED • Fuel TV • FX Network • National Geographic Channel • National Geographic Wild • MyNetworkTV (MNTV syndication) • Hulu.com • MySpace • AskMen.com • Foxsports.com • SKY • BSkyB (part) • STAR • Foxtel • GameSpy • Twentieth Century Fox Pictures • Twentieth Century Fox Television • Fox Searchlight Pictures • Fox Owned Television Stations • *The Wall Street Journal* and hundreds of newspapers and magazines worldwide

NBCUniversal***

NBC • Telemundo • CNBC • MSNBC • USA Network • Bravo • E! Entertainment • SyFy • Lifetime* • A&E* • Style Network • Oxygen • Sleuth • G4 • VERSUS • The Golf Channel • AZN TV • FEARnet • NBC Universal Studios • Universal Pictures • Universal Theme Parks • Comcast sports (5) • NBC Owned Television Stations • Comcast Cable Systems

*Disney/ABC, Comast/NBC, and the Hearsl Corporation jointly own the A&E Television Networks, which owns A&E, Lifetime Networks (3), Biography, History channels (3), the Military History Channel, and Crime & Investigation Network.
** The CW Television Network, formerly WB and UPN, is jointly owned by CBS and Time Warner.
*** NBCUniversal is controlled by Comoast Corporation, which owns 51 percent along with GE, which retains 49 percent.

1.19 The Producers

The veteran movie and television producers were traditionally the Big Seven studios of the Hollywood entertainment motion picture industry until Sony bought MGM-UA in 2004 (reducing the seven to six). Currently, the Big Six studios are Sony (Columbia TriStar, MGM), Walt Disney Studios (Buena Vista, Miramax, Touchstone), Paramount (CBS), 20th Century Fox (News Corp.), NBCUniversal, and Warner Brothers (CW)—though many would focus on the main four: Columbia TriStar, NBCUniversal, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount.

In addition, the independent production houses make Hollywood their base of operations. Among independent producers, Wolf Films, Carsey-Werner-Mandabach, WorldWide Pants, David E. Kelley and Steven Bochco used to be regular and prolific producers for the networks and the syndication market. But independents are increasingly being acquired by large studios, as when New World bought Stephen Cannell Productions, Viacom purchased DreamWorks, King World Productions went to CBS after its split-up from Viacom, and Witt/Thomas Productions was taken over by Warner Brothers. Not much is left.

Consider the prime-time lineup in 2003–04. According to the Coalition for Program Diversity, that season CBS owned 98 percent of its programming. FOX owned 80 percent, ABC owned over 70 percent, and NBCUniversal owned nearly 60 percent of prime-time programming. The Coalition for Program Diversity unsuccessfully lobbied the Federal Communications Commission in 2003 to require that the broadcast networks buy 25 percent of their content from independent producers. Instead, now the networks have some kind of ownership in 100 percent of what they air, at least in prime time. Moreover, the five major networks now require company ownership in all that their O&Os buy in the syndication marketplace. This may be full or partial participation, but as you can imagine, the economics of independent production are no longer "independent."

This pie-splitting situation has driven buyouts and mergers and will soon kill off some production companies…if it hasn't already. As examples, consider the independent producers listed above. As of 2010, Wolf Films' television arm was officially "associated" with NBCUniversal, as was WorldWide Pants. David E. Kelley now does not do production on his own, instead working mainly for FOX or ABC. Steven Bochco, while still listed as an independent producer, no longer has any dealings with broadcasting. Witt/Thomas, a company that can trace its history back to the beginnings of television in the 1950s, has been taken over by Warner Brothers. Like Steven Bochco, Carsey-Werner-Mandabach refused to sell and found its television market dried up. It no longer exists.

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Group ownership of the right stations in the right markets can be remarkably profitable. ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC's owned-and-operated stations (O&Os) constitute the most prominent group-owned constellations. The O&Os of just ABC, CBS, FOX or NBC in the top three markets—WABC, WCBS, WNYW and WNBC in New York; KABC, KCBS, KTTV and KNBC in Los Angeles; WLS, WBBM, WFLD and WMAQ in Chicago—gross more revenue than any other groups. FOX, currently with the largest potential television reach, is owned by Rupert Murdoch, the international media magnate (see 1.20).

Each of the Big Four television networks and CW (jointly owned by CBS and Time Warner) now has about 200 affiliates and owned stations. MyNetworkTV (MNTV) has about 165 affiliates, and Telemundo (owned by NBC) has about 145, while ION (formerly Pax) had somewhat less reach at about 100 affiliates and soon became a syndicator rather than a network.

Perhaps surprisingly, although it is the fifth strongest network overall in ratings, Univision has just about 50 affiliates, as does its owned co-network, TeleFutura (see Chapters 2 and 7). In those 50 markets, Univision's ratings often exceed

1.20 Rupert Murdoch and News Corp.*

News Corp. (which might easily be called the FOX Empire) is a giant among giants. Its annual revenue is nearly $35 billion, making News Corp. the third largest entertainment media conglomerate in America, barely behind only the Walt Disney Company (approximately $40 billion) and Comcast NBCUniversal (estimated $65 billion combined in January 2011, and yes, NBCUniversal is now one word).

News Corporation's holdings are vast. The annual report shows divisions in countries around the world for filmed entertainment, television, cable network programming, direct broadcast satellite television, newspapers and information services, integrated marketing services, book publishing and more. A sampling of media properties illustrates how vast the Fox Empire is.

- It owns all things 20th Century Fox, including film and television studios and distribution, music recording and publishing, product licensing and merchandising, Fox Searchlight Pictures and more.
- It operates all things FOX, including broadcast and cable networks, which cover the Fox Broadcasting Company—one of the "Big Four" networks along with ABC, CBS and NBC in America—plus MyNetworkTV, FoxSports, 27 owned-and-operated TV stations, many other Fox channels around the world, Fox News, FX, Fox Movie Channel, Speed, Fuel TV, FSN, a number of sports programs and networks globally, the STAR channels in Asia, Sky Italia in Europe, 39 percent of British Sky Broadcasting, various percentages of the National Geographic channels globally and more.
- Newspaper and information holdings include *The Wall Street Journal* (in America and Asia), the *Dow Jones Newswires, The Times* and *The Sun* in Europe, and almost 150 titles in Australia.
- The company owns HarperCollins Publishers in the western English-speaking world (U.S., Canada, Europe, New Zealand, Australia), and 40 percent of HarperCollins India.
- Digital media holdings include *MySpace.com* and the websites for all Fox shows (e.g., *AmericanIdol.com, TheSimpsons.com*).
- News Corp. even owns 32 percent of Hulu and 50 percent of the National Rugby League in Australia and New Zealand. (It once owned the Los Angeles Dodgers, too.)

The "fox" who controls this vast media empire is Rupert Murdoch (born Keith Rupert Murdoch on March 11, 1931), an Australian turned naturalized American (in 1985) who began his media career with one newspaper in Adelaide. Like all hugely successful moguls, Murdoch receives frequent criticism. A large scandal rocked his empire in the summer of 2011 when one of his British publications, *News of the World*, was implicated for illegally obtaining information and invading privacy, including bribing and phone hacking. The allegation that tipped the scale was hacking into the voice mail of murdered teenager Milly Dowler, possibly deleting messages and leading her parents to think she was still alive. The tabloid closed its doors, publishing its last issue on July 10, 2011. Soon after, News Corp. dropped

those of all other networks. Of course, how big each station's market is determines how many people can see the broadcasts, although cable channels spread reach even further. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of group ownership are spelled out in 1.21.

Because broadcast stations have a legal obligation to serve their specific communities of license, group owners must necessarily give their outlets a certain amount of latitude in programming decisions, especially decisions that affect obligations to serve local community interests. Beyond that, broadcast group owners generally employ a headquarters executive to oversee and coordinate programming functions at owned stations with varying degrees of decentralization.

As for cable, the days of adding and swapping bunches of new systems has largely passed. The largest MSOs focus instead on competing with phone companies such as AT&T and Verison (its FiOS service supplies video; see Chapter 3). Systems tend to create geographically close groupings, thus generating savings in management. Some MSOs have given slightly more autonomy to their local its $12 billion bid to acquire the remaining shares of British Sky Broadcasting. Rupert and his son, James, were called to testify before a British Parliamentary Committee regarding the allegations. Murdoch denied responsibility for what happened, arguing that the decisions were made by those he trusted. However, he did say he was "shocked, appalled, and shamed" at what had happened, apologizing in an advertisement "for the serious wrongdoing that occurred." At the company's annual shareholders' meeting in Los Angeles on October 21, 2011, some called for his ouster, but Rupert and his sons James and Lachlan survived the vote, retaining control of the media empire.

The scandal caused many in America to question, once again, the rightness of behemoth media conglomerates. Can Fox news reporters and journalists from News Corp.'s many other print and electronic media be objective in reporting on the man who has the power to fire them? How can reporters be removed far enough from managers to operate independently, or can they? What do you think about media consolidation in light of the News Corp. scandal?

In addition to the phone hacking charges, other criticism is aimed at Murdoch, too. For example, while some of the programs on FOX television are applauded for their wit and innovation, such as *The Simpsons* and *House*, others are derided for their debauchery and meanness, such as *Family Guy* and *Hell's Kitchen*. No one can argue, though, that FOX network has spawned some megahits, such as *American Idol* and *Glee*. Murdoch has often claimed that he is "a catalyst for change" in media. One implication is that, while a few people always condemn new ideas, the success of his enterprises demonstrates that hundreds of millions want to buy his programs, services and publications. Another implication is that his successes have forced others in the media business to change, too… and perhaps not always for the better.

Photo of Rupert Murdoch at the World Economic Forum, January 26, 2007, used by permission under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license, courtesy of the World Economic Forum. *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rupert_Murdoch_-_WEF_Davos_2007.jpg.*

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** Columbia Journalism Review* (www.cjr.org/resources/).

managers as they try to trim headquarters' budgets to reduce overhead. Nevertheless, cable group owners tend to centralize programming more than broadcasting groups do because cable has no special local responsibilities under federal law (as does broadcasting). Programming in the case of cable systems refers to what networks they carry, although many of the largest MSOs also own several cable program networks, so they also produce programs and have a vested interest in distributing them to all the markets they reach, irrespective of local preferences.

Executives concerned with programming, like those in every other aspect of broadcasting, cable, and new media, constantly need to update their knowledge of the rapidly evolving field and the rapidly increasing competition. The electronic trade press provides constant updates, but even more important are the many trade and professional associations that provide personal meetings, demonstrations, exhibits, seminars, and publications. Dozens of such associations bring practitioners together at conferences on every conceivable aspect of the media, all of which touch on programming in one way or another—

1.21 Group Ownership

The main programming advantages of group ownership are the cost savings in program purchases, equipment buys (such as computers, servers, and cameras), and service charges (such as by reps and consultants) that accrue from buying at wholesale, so to speak. Insofar as groups produce their own programs, they also save because production costs can be divided among the several stations in the group—a kind of built-in syndication factor. Moreover, group-produced programs increasingly are offered for sale to other stations in the general syndication market, constituting an added source of income for the group owners.

Group buys often give the member stations first crack at newly released syndicated programming as well as a lower cost-per-station. Distributors of syndicated programs can afford such discounts because it costs them less in overhead to make a sale to a single headquarters than to deal individually with many stations (see Chapter 6 on Syndication). A large group can deliver millions of households in a single sale. Large group owners can also afford a type of negative competition called *warehousing*. This refers to the practice of snapping up desirable syndicated program offerings for which the group has no immediate need but which it would like to keep out of the hands of the competition by holding them on the shelf until useful later. Also, group executives have bird's-eye views of the national market that sometimes give them advance information, enabling them to bid on new programs before the competition even knows of their availability. For their part, producers often minimize the risk of investing in new series by delaying the start of production until at least one major group owner has made an advance commitment to buy a series. Many promising program proposals for first-run access time languish on the drawing boards for lack of an advance commitment to purchase.

The stations in the top four markets that are owned and operated by the national television networks exercise extraordinary power by virtue of their group-owned status. Each such O&O group reaches about two-fifths of the entire U.S. population of television households, making their collective decisions to buy syndicated programs crucial to the success of such programs. Thus, these few group-owned stations influence national programming trends for the entire syndicated program market. So important to the success of programs is their exposure in the top markets that some

conferences on advertising, copyright, education, engineering, digital media, finance, law, management, marketing, music, news, production, programs, promotion, research, satellites and telephone, to name just some.

Licensing groups provide the legal and economic environment that ensures that artists get paid royalties for their works. The best-known of these associations, organizations and groups are listed in 1.22, with more about the most important of all associations to programmers—the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE)—in 1.23.

Regulatory Influences

The hottest topic in media regulation is *net neutrality*, the idea that FCC should develop rules preventing broadband companies from favoring their owned content and from charging fees for giving priority to certain signals on the internet. This disagreement pits giant broadband companies as Comcast, Google, Verison, AT&T and Time Warner against those who favor treating the internet like telephone lines, where all comers get free and equal treatment. The pivotal issue might be called "pay to play," meaning that distributors are likely to give favored treatment to companies that pay the most (see Chapter 4).

Broadcast radio and television, more than most other kinds of businesses, must live within constraints imposed by national, state and local statutes and administrative boards. Moreover, public opinion imposes its own limitations, even in the absence of government regulation. The trend to "let the marketplace decide" led to enormous media conglomerates and limited government involvement. Only a syndication companies offer special inducements to get their wares on the prestigious prime access slots on network O&O stations. These inducements can take the form of attractively structured barter syndication deals or cash payments to ensure carriage. The latter type of deal, known as a compensation incentive, occurs primarily in New York, the country's premier market.

Although O&O stations remain legally responsible for serving their individual local markets, they naturally also reflect the common goals and interests of their networks. As an example of a rather subtle network influence, consider the choice of the prime access program that serves as a lead-off to the network's evening schedule. An ordinary affiliate (that is, one bound to its network only by contract rather than by the ties of ownership; see Chapter 8) can feel free to choose a program that serves its own best interests as a station. An O&O station, however, must choose a lead-in advantageous to the network program that follows, irrespective of its advantage to the station. O&O stations also must take great care in choosing and producing programs to protect the group image, especially in New York, where they live next door to company headquarters.

The big cable and telephone system owners (MVPDs) have many of the same advantages as broadcast groups, however. Cable systems normally obtain licenses to carry entire channels of cable programming rather than individual programs or program series (see Chapters 3 and 9). Thus, major MVPDs, negotiating on behalf of hundreds of local cable or phone systems and tens of thousands of subscribers, gain enormous leverage over program suppliers. Indeed, a cable network's very survival depends upon signing up one or more of the largest MVPDs.

Group headquarters programmers and their sometimes extensive staffs impose an additional layer of bureaucracy that tends to slow local decision making. Local program executives know their local markets best and can adapt programming strategies to specific needs and conditions. A group-acquired TV program may be well suited to a large market but will not necessarily meet the needs of a small-market member of the group. When a huge MVPD such as Comcast makes a purchase for hundreds of different systems, not every system will find the choice adapted ideally to its needs. Group ownership imposes some inflexibility as the price of its economies of scale.

few rules remain that programmers must know to avoid possible violations within their jurisdictions.

Fairness and Equal Opportunity

Both broadcast stations and local cable-originated programming must observe the rules governing both the appearances of candidates for political office (*equal time*) and station editorials. The equal-time rule for political candidates demands that broadcasters and cable access channels (not cable or satellite operators) provide equal opportunities for federal candidates, effectively preventing entertainers and news personnel from running for office while still remaining on their programs.

Although the FCC has formally abandoned its specific Fairness Doctrine concerning discussion of controversial issues of local importance, many managers continue to adhere to the basic fairness concepts as a matter of station policy. Day-to-day enforcement of such rules and policies devolves largely on the production staff in the course of operations, but programmers often articulate station policies regarding balance and stipulate compliance routines. Fairness looms large in talk radio and talk television because the talk so often deals with controversial topics.

Monopoly

Traditionally, various rules have limited concentrations of media ownership, all of them aimed at ensuring diversity of information sources—in keeping with implicit First Amendment goals—although the recent trend has been to loosen the rules. Nonetheless, group owners of broadcast stations are

1.22 The Associations

Here is a list of important organizations, along with the home page listings (when available) for the World Wide Web.

Major Industry Trade Associations

National Association of Broadcasters (NAB): *www.nab.org*
National Cable & Telecommunications Association (NCTA): *www.ncta.com*
Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA): *www.rtnda.org*
Writers Guild of America—West & East (WGAW & WGAE): *http://wga.org & www.wgaeast.org*
Independent Film Association (IFTA): *www.ifta-online.org*

Programming Organizations

National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE): ***www.natpe.org***
MIPTV: ***www.miptv.com***
National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB): ***www.nfcb.org***
Alliance for Community Media (ACM): *www.alliancecm.org*
Media Communications Association International (MCAI), formerly the Independent Television Association: ***www.mca-i.org***
Association of Independent Commercial Producers (AICP): ***www.aicp.com***
Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP): *www.amptp.org*

Music Licensing Groups

American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP): *www.ascap.com*
Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI): *www.bmi.com*
SESAC: *www.sesac.com*

Technical Societies

Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE): *www.smpte.org*
Society of Broadcast Engineers: *www.sbe.org*
International Radio & Television Society (IRTS): *www.irts.org*
Visual Effects Society (represents special effects artists): *www.visualeffectssociety.com*
International Association for Radio, Telecommunications and Electromagnetics (NARTE): *www.narte.org*

Marketing and Sales Organizations

Television Bureau of Advertising (TVB): *www.tvb.org*
Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB): *www.rab.com*
Syndicated Network Television Association (SNTA): *www.snta.org*
Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau (CAB): *www.onetvworld.org*
Cable & Telecommunications Association for Marketing (CTAM): *www.ctam.com*
Promax: *www.promax.tv*

particularly sensitive to regulatory compliance in this area because they have a high financial stake in compliance and, of course, are conspicuous targets susceptible to monopoly charges.

For many years, cable franchises were regarded as "natural monopolies," because it seemed uneconomic to duplicate cable installations (*overbuilds*). Telephone companies, however, have stepped into this breach. Upgrading existing telephone lines to fiber permitted digital broadband delivery (called DSL), starting the trend for phone companies to compete for cable consumers by offering packages of telephone, internet connection and satellite television channels in some communities. Now Comcast's XFinity, AT&T's U-Verse and Verizon's FiOS battle head to head for subscribers in many large markets.

Localism

The FCC traditionally nudged broadcasters toward a modicum of localism in their program mixes, and expected licensees to find out about local problems